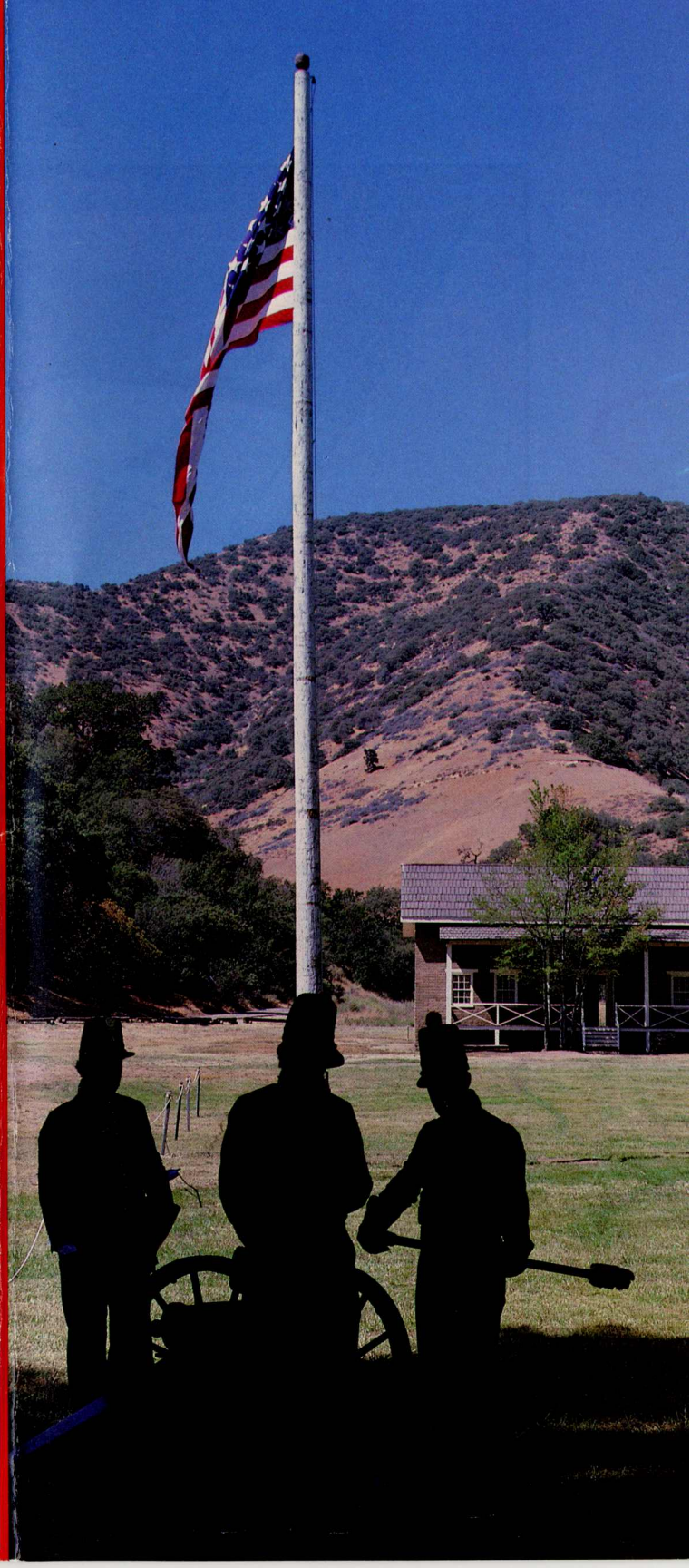
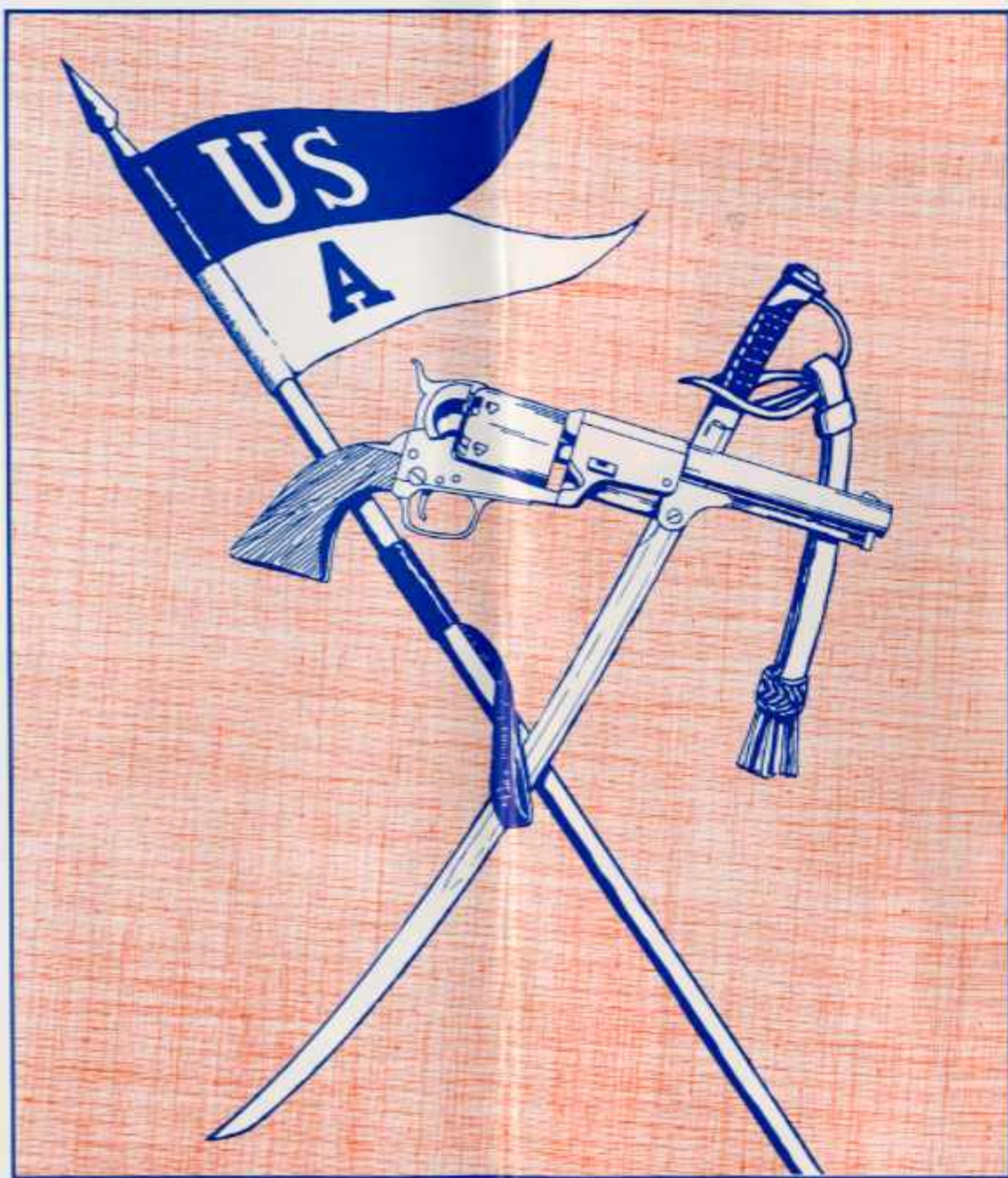


# FORT TEJON

State Historic Park





Cover Photos: Trooper, Company A, 1st Dragoons, wearing the 1851-pattern dress uniform. Ceremonial flag raisings and other living history programs are regularly scheduled throughout the year at Fort Tejon.

**F**ort Tejon is located in Grapevine Canyon on Interstate Highway Five, the main route between California's great central valley and Southern California. The fort was established to protect and control the Indians who were living on the Sebastian Indian Reservation, and to protect both the reservation Indians and white settlers from raids by the wide-ranging and rather warlike Paiutes, Chemehuevi, Mojave, and other Indian groups of the desert regions to the south and east. Fort Tejon was first garrisoned by the United States Army on August 10, 1854 and was abandoned ten years later on September 11, 1864.

## Early History of the Area

**T**he Native Americans who lived in this area prior to establishment of Fort Tejon are generally referred to as the Emigdiano. They were an inland group of the Chumash people who lived along the Santa Barbara Channel coastline. Unlike their coastal relatives, however, the Emigdiano avoided contact with European explorers and settlers, and were never brought into one of the missions or even incorporated into the Sebastian Indian Reservation. One of their villages was located at Tecuya Creek, north of Castac Lake. Another village, Sasau, was on the north shore of the lake, while a third and still larger village, Lapau, was located at the bottom of Grapevine Canyon. Once Fort Tejon was established, the Emigdiano often worked as independent contractors for the army, providing guides for bear hunts and delivering fresh fruits from their fields for sale on officers' row.

European explorers and settlers rarely passed through Grapevine Canyon during the early years of Spanish and Mexican rule, but in 1806, a Spanish army officer, Lieutenant Francisco Ruiz, named it *Canada de las Uvas* (Canyon of the Grapes). In 1842, Jose Maria Covarrubias of Santa Barbara applied to the governor of Alta California for a land grant, and in 1843 he was given title to the area he called Rancho Castac. He never lived on his rancho, but grazed cattle and hired Indian laborers to work there.

During the 1850s, the land was acquired by Samuel Bishop for use as a cattle ranch, but even while he was trying to obtain clear title to the area, several high-level policy decisions were made that had a direct impact on the Tejon area.

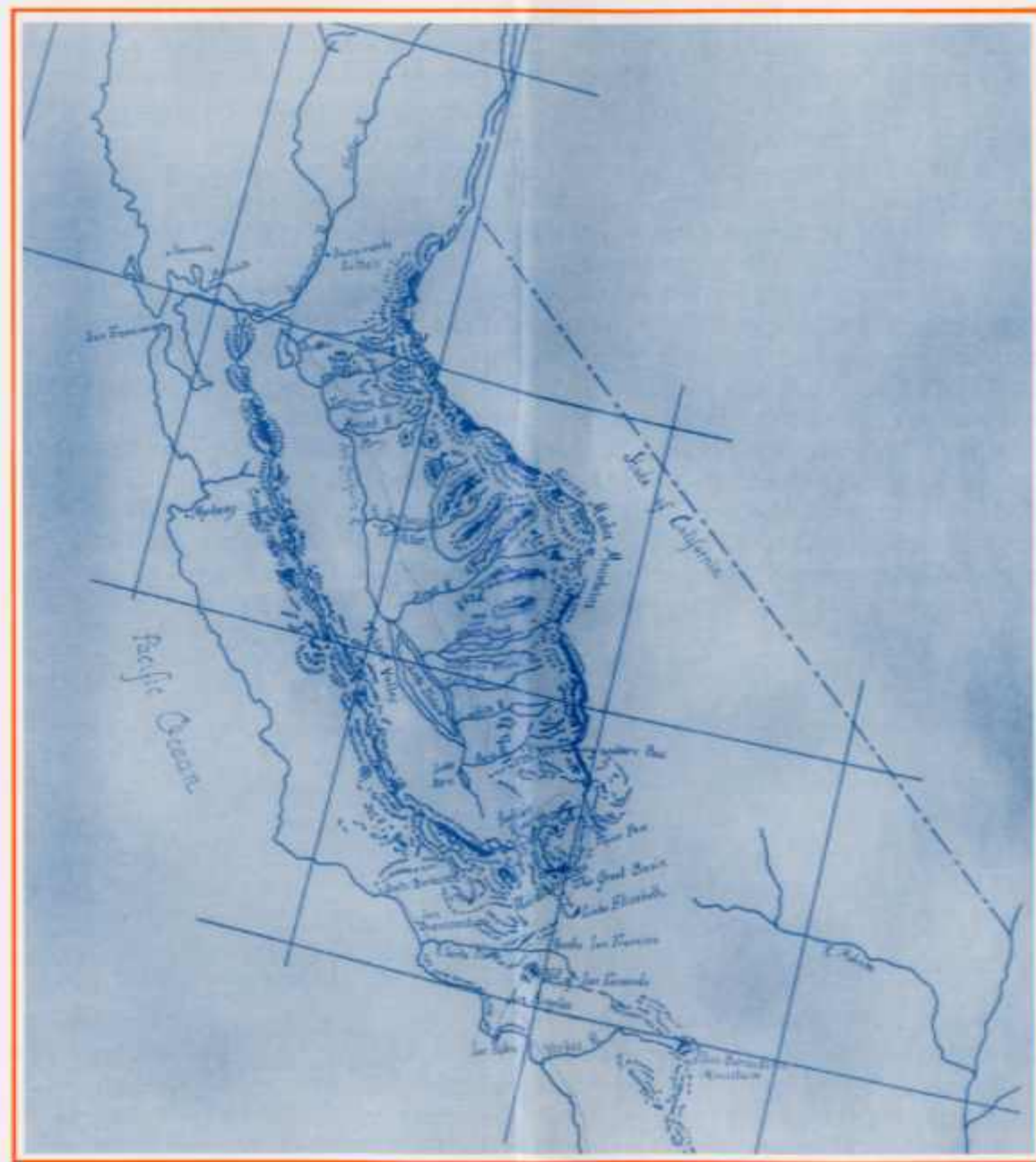
In 1853, President Millard Fillmore appointed Edward F. Beale to the position of Superintendent of Indian Affairs for California and Nevada, and sent him to California to head off further confrontations between the Indians and the many gold seekers and other settlers who were then pouring into California. After studying the situation, Beale decided that the best approach was to set up a large Indian reservation at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley and to invite displaced Indian groups to settle there.



*Edward F. Beale became a national celebrity in September 1848 when the eastern press carried back-to-back stories about his daring exploits at San Pasqual in 1846 (with Kit Carson), and his more recent trip through Mexico (disguised as a Mexican, see illustration) bringing letters about the California gold discovery (and a small sample of gold) to President James K. Polk.*

In order to implement his plan, Beale requested a federal appropriation of \$500,000 and military support for the 75,000-acre reservation he had selected at the foot of Tejon Pass. Colonel Ethan Allen Hitchcock, commander of the Pacific Division of the U.S. Army, supported Beale's plan and agreed to set up a military post on or near the Indian reservation. The army was eager, in any case, to abandon Fort Miller (near Fresno) in favor of a more strategically advantageous site in the southern San Joaquin Valley.

Both Beale and his successor, Thomas J. Henley, wanted the fort to be near, but not actually on the Indian reservation, and so in August 1854, Major J. L. Donaldson, a quartermaster officer, chose the present site in Canada de las Uvas. The site was handsome and promised adequate wood and water. It was just 17 miles southwest of the Sebastian Indian Reservation, and it was right on what Major Donaldson was convinced would become the main route between the central valley and Southern California.



*Map of California, circa 1854*

On August 10, 1854, First Lieutenant Thomas F. Castor led a detachment of Company A, First U. S. Dragoons, into camp. The rest of Company A arrived a few days later. Construction of military facilities began immediately and continued on and off for the next six years. Major Donaldson drew up detailed plans for the post and issued contracts for supplies, building materials, forage, beef, and labor.

Since Fort Tejon was in no danger of being attacked, it was set up as a garrison for troops and not as a defensive installation. Thus there were no walls around the post and the military had the luxury of spreading out across the canyon. Ultimately, more than 40 buildings were constructed to support military operations, plus two structures for the post sutler, a civilian who was authorized to sell goods to the soldiers on the post. Outside the post itself, a town sprang up to take advantage of the large amounts of money being spent to construct and maintain the post. The town also supplied the needs of the civilian work force, the soldiers, and their families. In 1858, The Overland Mail Company began using Fort Tejon as a way station on its main overland route between St. Louis and San Francisco.

In July 1856, headquarters of the First U.S. Dragoons was ordered to Fort Tejon from Fort Union, New Mexico. It arrived in mid-December after a long desert march. The dragoons continued to be stationed at Fort Tejon except for one brief period in 1857 and 1858 when they were sent off to Oregon. During their absence a detachment of the Third Artillery, serving as infantry, was stationed at Fort Tejon. But the dragoons soon returned and the post was again garrisoned by dragoons, generally two companies of them - 100 to 120 men in all.



First Lieutenant  
Thomas F. Castor



Brevet Lt. Colonel Benjamin L. Beall,  
Commanding Officer, Fort Tejon

## Life at Fort Tejon

On August 11, 1854, the day after he arrived at "Camp Canada de las Uvas," the site that came to be known as Fort Tejon, 1st Lieutenant Thomas F. Castor, Company A, 1st U.S. Dragoons, issued the following order:

### *Post Order Number One:*

*Until further orders, the calls at this camp are established as follows:*

<i>Reveille</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>4 1/2 o'clock A.M.</i>
<i>Breakfast</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>6 o'clock A.M.</i>
<i>Surgeon's Call</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>6 1/2 o'clock A.M.</i>
<i>Fatigue Call</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>7 o'clock A.M.</i>
<i>Recall and Dinner</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>12 M.</i>
<i>Fatigue Call</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>1 o'clock P.M.</i>
<i>Recall</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>6 o'clock P.M.</i>
<i>Retreat</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>Sunset</i>
<i>Tattoo</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>8 1/2 o'clock P.M.</i>

Early in October 1854, this schedule was endorsed and continued in effect by Brevet Lt. Colonel Benjamin L. Beall, who was then serving as post commander. The order continued in effect until the latter part of June 1855. Notice that the schedule calls for a ten-hour work day. The term "fatigue call" referred to work assignments around the post, mainly construction work. "Tattoo" meant lights out.

The dragoons at Fort Tejon patrolled a wide area and had many responsibilities. They settled disputes involving Indians in the Tule and Kern River districts. They toured the Owens Valley, the San Gabriel Valley, and the Mojave River country to "overawe" the Indians of those regions and to protect miners and prospectors. In 1858, a small subpost was established at San Bernardino, and in 1860, Camp Cady (downstream from present-day Daggett on the Mojave River) was manned for a time by dragoons from Fort Tejon. The dragoons were even sent to Los Angeles on occasion to maintain order there.

Occasionally the administrators of Sebastian Indian Reservation called on the Dragoons at Fort Tejon to help maintain order, but more often the Dragoons had to protect the Reservation Indians from nearby white settlers. This kind of problem tended to follow an attack on the whites by Paiute, Mojave, Chemehuevi or other Colorado River Indians, some of whom were truly great desert travellers, able to cross the Mojave even in mid-summer and strike the coastal settlements without warning. The raids were usually aimed at livestock that belonged either to the reservation Indians or to white prospectors, miners, road builders, or settlers. The victims of those raids were often very fierce in their turn and most of them did not bother to distinguish between one Indian and another.

In a letter to his relatives in the east, the commander of Company A, Captain John W. T. Gardiner, commented on an incident of this kind.



*Captain John W. T. Gardiner*

The buildings around the parade ground included barracks buildings for the Dragoons, small houses for the officers, a hospital, storage sheds and warehouses, a bakery, and other shops or work areas. The civilian population lived nearby in tents and other relatively makeshift structures.

"Our Indian war is over for the present," Gardiner wrote on June 30, 1855, "and I do not think it will be revived unless the whites commit more murders. The (reservation) Indians look to us as their protectors. The stories that I have heard of the outrages perpetrated by the whites would be incredible were they not well vouched for. The Indians of the Tule and Kern Rivers, and Tehachapi Mountains, are naturally quiet and would continue so if left alone."

Along with tending to Indian affairs, or chasing bandits, the Dragoons often rode the supply route between Los Angeles and Fort Mojave. On one occasion, they traveled nearly to Salt Lake City in order to protect a U.S. Army paymaster.

Construction work at the fort made rapid progress in 1856 and '57, and eventually about 15 adobe buildings surrounded the central parade ground. As many as 25 other buildings were located near the fort, some of them on the far side of what is now Interstate Highway Five.



*Earliest known sketch of Fort Tejon by Captain Edward Townsend, October 1855*



Sergeant



- |                                    |                              |  |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 1-4 Officer's Quarters             | 18 Guardroom                 | 26 Office and Storehouse                       |
| 5-6 Stables (built-never occupied) | 19 Prison                    | 27 Quartermaster's Shops                       |
| 7-12 Kitchen and/or Mess           | 20 Officer's Quarters        | 28 Sutlery, Overland Mail and Telegraph Office |
| 13 Barracks 2                      | 21 Kitchen                   | 29-30 Stables                                  |
| 14 Barracks 1                      | 22 Bakery                    | 31 Granary                                     |
| 15 Officer's Quarters              | 23 Hospital/Commissary       | 32 Blacksmith Shop                             |
| 16 Headquarters and Band           | 24 Guard House               |  |
| 17 Officer's Quarters              | 25 Quartermaster's Warehouse |  |



First Lieutenant

Many buildings at Fort Tejon were damaged by a severe earthquake in January 1857, but despite this setback, and despite many other quakes throughout 1856 and '57, the dragoons were able to move into the buildings and did in fact occupy them until 1861.

A visitor to the fort in November 1857 described the place as follows:

"The post is about two or three miles from the mouth of the beautiful Canon de las Uvas. Upon entering the limits is the sutler's store, a fine commodious adobe building, plastered on the outside and whitewashed. To the right of the sutler's store is the quartermaster's store and office, also a fine two-story building.... Both are about 250 or 300 yards from headquarters.

"Headquarters, company quarters, and the hospital are all built on a slight elevation on either side of the parade ground.... All the quarters are furnished in the best style; and it is generally acknowledged to be one of the finest, if not the best post on the Pacific Coast.... You can form no idea of the beauty of this place until you visit it."

The climate at Fort Tejon had an important influence on morale. Almost everyone enjoyed the long, gentle springtimes:

"The post of Tejon is on a little plain, entirely surrounded by high mountains, beautifully situated in a grove of old oaks. At this season the fort is a most romantic and beautiful place. The noble oaks are in full leaf, and on the plains and mountainsides, mother nature has almost excelled herself, carpeting them with flowers of every hue, giving to the eye one of the most beautiful prospects imaginable; and the air is bracing and exhilarating and inspiring. An oasis in the desert where all is freshness and life."

On the other hand, some residents of the fort were used to the summer rains and humidity of the Eastern United States. They found the hot, dry Southern California summers thoroughly depressing. The letters of Captain and Mrs. Gardiner, for example, included the following comments:

"There is little water. A little branch that you can step over with ease is dignified with the name of river.... No rain falls for many months in summer, and a more dreary expanse than the parched plains you cannot imagine.... A few clouds would be such a relief, and a thunder-storm a luxury too great to be described. But we cannot hope for such things for months to come."

Homesickness, loneliness, and boredom took their toll of the dragoons, and desertions or long absences without leave were common. Drinking, gambling, and other diversions relieved some of the boredom among the enlisted men, but caused problems as well. Life at Fort Tejon could also be deadly dull for the wives of officers and others who could not leave the area due to sickness or some other reason.

## The Camel Experiment

During the 1850s, The U.S. Army experimented with camels in hope of developing improved and more economical transport across the wide reaches of the arid west. Fort Tejon played a small role in this experiment after 1857, when Edward F. Beale brought 22 camels to Samuel Bishop's ranch near the fort. He had used the camels to carry forage and supplies for the road surveying party he had been commissioned to lead from Fort Defiance, New Mexico Territory to the Colorado River.

The following year, Beale used the camels once again to haul supplies for the construction crews who were marking and improving the wagon road that had been surveyed the year before. The apparent success of this camel experiment caused the U.S. Army to ask that the camels be turned over to them at Fort Tejon. The War Department refused the request, but on November 17, 1859, Bishop brought the camels to Fort Tejon and left them to be cared for through the winter. They were turned out once again to graze on Bishop's ranch in the spring of 1860 after Brevet Major James H. Carleton refused to use them for his Mojave expedition.

In September, Captain Winfield S. Hancock, Assistant Quartermaster in Los Angeles, experimented with camels as a way of reducing the expense of messenger service between Los Angeles and the recently established Fort Mojave on the Colorado River. Unfortunately, one of the "express camels" died near the Fishponds (modern Barstow), and the experiment was considered a failure. It was noted that while the camels were cheaper to maintain, they were really no faster than the two-mule buckboard in service under contract with the Army.

Early in 1861, three camels were used to carry provisions for the California-Nevada boundary survey under J.R.N. Owen. The expedition ran into severe difficulties, though the camels performed well and may even have saved the lives of Owen and his men. Afterward, the camels were turned over to Captain Hancock in Los Angeles where they were soon joined by those that had been left at Fort Tejon. Eventually, the camels were taken to the Benicia Arsenal and sold at auction.

## The Civil War Years

Abandonment of Fort Tejon was discussed as early as 1855 by various individuals in the Army, both in the field and in Washington, D. C. One critic claimed, for example, that the fort was "useless and expensive." It was "located in a cold, bleak, inhospitable, and worthless region of the country rocked by earthquakes, unsuitable for the habitation of the white man and deserted by the Indians." It was said that the remote and isolated garrison at Fort Tejon cost \$55,000 more to maintain than a similar operation would cost in Los Angeles or San Bernardino.

In 1861, the Civil War added new reasons for the abandonment of Fort Tejon. Veteran fighting men of the First Dragoons were badly needed in the East, and troops were also needed in San Bernardino, El Monte, and other communities throughout California where Southern sympathizers were known to be present in numbers.

In June 1861, despite protests from local ranchers, the dragoons were transferred away from Fort Tejon, and with their departure the civilian population melted away overnight. Many of the dragoons from Fort Tejon later fought - and some died - amid the tragic violence of America's Civil War. Nine officers who served at Fort Tejon during its active period achieved the rank of general during or after the war.

In the summer of 1862, about a year after the abandonment of Fort Tejon, sporadic violence broke out between white settlers and the Indians of the Owens Valley. Several lives were lost and unsettled conditions continued through the winter. The following spring, three cavalry companies of the First California Volunteers were sent into the Owens Valley. They rounded up about 1,100 Indians and took them to the Sebastian Reservation. In August 1863, several hundred of these Indians were moved from the reservation to Fort Tejon, which was then being occupied by the California Volunteers. The Indians were forced to remain in Grapevine Canyon until the following summer although little or no food, clothing, or other support was given them. Starvation, disease, and desertion thinned their ranks during the winter of 1863 before orders were finally received in August 1864 that called for the Indians to be placed on the Tule River Indian Reservation east of Visalia. Shortly after that, orders came through from Department of the Pacific Army Headquarters in San Francisco that Fort Tejon should be abandoned once again.

On the morning of September 11, 1864, the troops left for Drum Barracks in Wilmington near Los Angeles, and Fort Tejon, at least as an active military outpost became a matter of history.

## After the War

Even before Fort Tejon was abandoned by the U.S. Army, Edward F. Beale began to purchase land in the area. He and a handful of associates acquired the Sebastian Indian Reservation lands when the federal government abandoned that project, and Beale continued to acquire land in the area throughout the 1860s. Eventually he came to own an enormous tract - tens of thousands of acres - of mountainous, semi-arid land in the Tehachapi and Emigdio Mountains.

Beale hired literally hundreds of people to grow various crops and tend great herds of sheep and cattle on what he called the Tejon Ranch. In addition to the Mexican and American employees, there were some 300 Indian workers on the ranch, many of them natives of the Tehachapi and other nearby mountain areas and most of them one-time residents of the reservation. Beale hired these Indians and their families to work on the ranch, and also gave

them five-acre plots of land for homesites and personal farming ventures. The adobe buildings that had served the army at Fort Tejon and others on the old Sebastian Indian Reservation were used as residences, stables, and storehouses.



*Edward F. Beale, 1862*



*Hospital building at Fort Tejon, 1888.*



*Tejon Ranch stables, 1888.*

Roving bands of outlaws, drought, and changing economic conditions caused many a difficulty, but Beale nevertheless managed to make a fortune out of wool and other ranch products so that after about 1870 he was able to spend roughly half of each year in Washington, D. C. where he acquired and lived in Decatur House, perhaps the capital city's most impressive private residence after the White House itself. He took an active role in politics and was one of President Grant's most trusted advisors.

In 1872, the success of Beale's acquisition and development strategy for the ranch, including his program for the Indians, led the distinguished editor and writer, Charles Nordhoff, to describe the Tejon Ranch as perhaps "the most magnificent estate in a single hand in America."

After Beale's death in April 1893, the 269,215-acre Tejon Ranch continued in operation under highly skilled managers until 1912 when it was acquired by a group of investors led by Harrison Gray Otis, publisher of the Los Angeles Times. Under this new ownership, the ranch was further expanded, and then turned over to a corporation, the Tejon Ranch Company, which was incorporated in 1936 and continues to this day.

## Creation of the State Park

In 1939, at the urging of Kern County citizen groups, five acres, including the old parade ground and the foundations and other remnants of the original adobe buildings at Fort Tejon, were gift deeded to the people of California by the Tejon Ranch Corporation for state park purposes. Restoration work on the adobe buildings began in 1949. An additional 200 acres were purchased from the Tejon Ranch Corporation in 1954.

Structural restoration of the original barracks building and reconstruction of the officer quarters was completed in 1957. These two buildings and one other century-old adobe are authentic and visible reminders of Fort Tejon as it looked during the 1850s and 1860s when it was an active frontier military post.

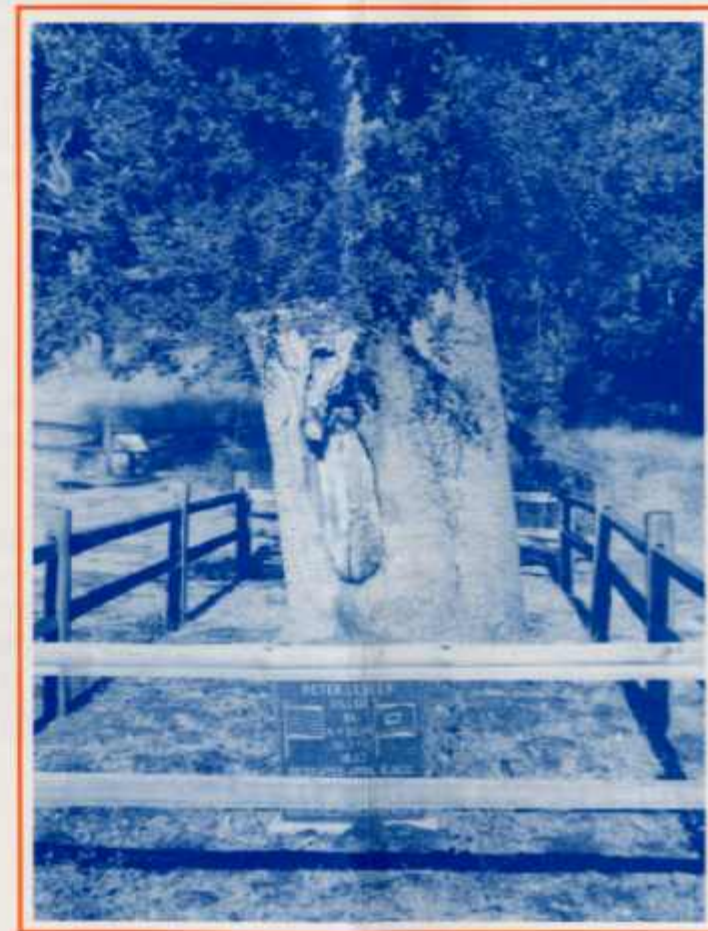


*Reconstructed Officer Quarters*

## The Peter le Beck Oak

A very large valley oak on the north side of the parade grounds is a living reminder of Fort Tejon's most intriguing mystery. R. S. Williamson mentioned the tree in his railroad route exploration report of 1853. He noted that one tree in Grapevine Canyon on the future site of the fort had an inscription cut deeply into the wood. It read: "Peter le Beck, killed by a x bear, Oct. 17, 1837."

Several interesting conjectures have been advanced as to the identity of the slain man, but none has been definitely established. Peter le Beck - who he was, what he was doing here, and who buried him - remains a mystery.



## The Park Today

Elevations range from 3,250 feet above sea level at the park office to approximately 4,500 feet in the back country. Light snow falls during the winter, but high temperatures during the summer are usually in the upper 80s and low 90s. The transition seasons, spring and fall, are very mild and quite comfortable. Annual precipitation is about 15 inches.

Trees and shrubs in the park include some large valley oaks, (one specimen is eight feet in diameter), blue oak, black willow, cottonwood, juniper, buckeye, cattails, buckwheat, yucca, and a colorful variety of wildflowers in the springtime.

The most commonly seen animals include blacktailed deer, blacktailed hare, cottontail and brush rabbits, and beechey ground squirrels. Bobcats, badgers, opossums, coyotes, gray foxes, and various small rodents can be seen occasionally. Black bears and mountain lions are present but rarely seen.

A few of the resident birds include California quail, mountain quail, scrub jay, brown towhee, western bluebird, kestrel, redtailed hawk, hairy woodpecker, red-shafted flicker, and various smaller migratory birds such as the house finch, purple martin, western robin, mourning dove, and several kinds of hummingbirds.

## About Your Visit

Close beside Grapevine Creek near the park entrance there is a visitor center with historical exhibits, publications, and other information. The nearby picnic area enables park visitors to escape the roar of the highway and sample the quiet serenity of historic Fort Tejon.

The park also includes a primitive group campground suitable for up to fifty people. It can be reserved by calling MISTIX at 1-800/444-7275.

Various historical demonstrations and special events are presented at Fort Tejon by the park staff and a group of dedicated volunteers. These events are scheduled throughout the year and are open to the public. For information about dates and times, or to make arrangements for guided tours for school or other groups, please contact the park staff.

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